



PHOTOGRAPHY/ GARY McKELLAR

Dale Berge shows fragments of old Union Fort's wall in an excavation near the Jehu Cox home.

## Excavation turns up part of Union Fort wall

■ **Historic site:** Discovery confirms importance of area, archaeologist says.

By Joe Costanzo  
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UNION — The unearthing this week of fragments of Union Fort's original stone wall is being called a "significant find" and one more reason to protect the historic site from commercial development.

"There is nothing else like it in the valley," said Steve Madsen, a historian who has been battling a planned expansion of the Family Center at Fort Union into what is left of the pioneer-era Union Fort.

He said efforts are under way to place the wall and the nearby Jehu Cox home on the National Register of Historic Sites.

Brigham Young University archaeology professor Dale Berge, who directed the excavation, said that while the discovery was not unexpected, it confirms the historic importance of the area.

"There are no remains of fort walls like this anymore in the Salt Lake Valley," Berge said. "It seems to me that, little by little, we are losing our historic past to development."

The wall fragments were found near the Jehu Cox house, an adobe and stone structure built in 1849 and

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believed to be the second oldest pioneer house in Utah. In 1853, a fort was built around the Union settlement as a defense against Indians. The fort was never attacked, however.

Berge said the fort wall was constructed on gravel, sand and clay footings 4 feet deep. The wall was 6 feet wide at the base and tapered to 2 feet at the top, which was 12 feet high. The rectangular fort covered about 10 acres.

Settlers used clay and lime mortar to bind the stones in the wall, said Berge. Only the first two layers of cobblestones remain in the fragments Berge uncovered.

As significant as the wall may be, Berge said he is more impressed with the Jehu Cox house. "That's something that should be preserved," he said. "It would be a shame to destroy this evidence of the past."

An architectural firm under contract with Salt Lake County is evaluating four options for the Union Fort site and remaining structures, including moving them or restoring them in place. The historic site is located south of the Family Center along Little Cottonwood Creek

near 7200 S. 1300 East.

Berge prefers the latter, saying, "People adapt and live in the natural environment, and it's nice to see these things in that environment. It gives you a sense of what they had to do to cope."

The County Commission voted April 1 to amend the area's master plan to permit commercial development along with a historic park. However, the plan doesn't specify whether the park will be at the existing site or adjacent to it.

A representative of Hermes Associates, which is proposing the expansion of the Family Center, last month rejected the preservationists' assertions that the project would destroy the Jehu Cox house. An engineering consulting firm hired by Hermes reported that the structure can be moved safely.

Commissioners also appointed a committee to "search for common ground" in the Union Fort debate, asking for recommendations within 30 days. That deadline has since been extended so that committee members will have access to the architectural report.

Meanwhile, Madsen said preservationists have launched a "Save the Fort" campaign, which includes clearing debris from the site, planting flowers and crops on the land, soliciting funds for the fight and operating an information network.